An Inaugural Dissertation:
on
Acute Rheumatism.

By Willie Jones. of North Carolina.

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Rheumatism:

Dr Cullen has defined rheumatism according to the following translation:- A disease from an external and often an evident cause, pyrexia; pain about the joints following the course of the muscles, fixing upon the larger joints in proportion to the smaller, increased by external heat. He then divides it into two species, the acute and Chronic; the former is pyrexia distinguishing the former; and at pyrexia in the latter.

The acute form (the only form I shall notice) is ushered in with the usual symptoms of pyrexia: with lassitude and vigours, succeeded by heat, thirst, anxiety and restlessness. Pulse hard, full and quick; the blood when drawn from a vein exhibits an inflammatory crust upon cooling. These are soon succeeded by

many excruciating pains in different parts of the body, but worse in the joints than in other parts; On the approach of morning there is an exacerbation of the fever, and during the night the pains become very severe, and is generally increased by the slight est motion or pressure. The stomach in this disease is rarely much affected, but the bowels are generally costive. In the early stage of the complaint, some degree of sweating takes place; but without determining to a crisis. The urine is scanty and deep coloured, and cloudy without a distinct sediment at first; but after the fever has advanced and several excurbations and remissions have taken place, a copious sediment is deposited.

Diagnosis. Gout and rheumatism are so closely allied, in their more perfect forms, as that they are very liable to be confounded. And in many

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instances, we have to distinguish them rather by the collateral circumstances of temperament, previous life, antecedent affections of the digestive organs, than from the appearances of the actual symptoms themselves. The best diagnostics are, that rheumatism arises from some evident cause; Gout on the contrary does not. The latter is always ushered in with gastric distress. The attack of rheumatism is not so sudden as a fit of gout, and does not often attack the small joints, but confines itself chiefly to the large joints. The fever is more continued in rheumatism, than in gout. So closely allied are these two diseases, that they were considered identical, until distinguished by Ballonius in sixteen hundred and forty-two, in his treatise "De Rheumatismo et Pleuritide Dorsali".

Predisposing Causes. The early years of infancy are in great measure exempt from rheuma-

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tism, though persons of all ages become sometimes affected. It most frequently attacks persons from ten to fifty years of age. After the age of fifty, it more commonly appears in the chronic form.

Whatever causes induce debility, either general or partial, in the tendons, ligaments &c become predisposing causes to the acute or chronic rheumatism.

Neither sex is indiscriminately liable to have an attack of rheumatism, but the male sex appears to constitute the largest portion.

The season of the year is a predisposing cause, in proportion to the degree of moisture and variable temperature prevailing. It appears ~~[illegible]~~ more frequently in the spring and autumn than at any other seasons.

Excessive perspiration, however produced, disposing the body to the injurious influence, of exposure to a damp and cold atmosphere, is a very active predisposing cause.

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Exciting Causes. The above may be brought into action by the influence of a variable temperature, either generally or partially applied, or either through the medium of a wet or cold air alone or both together. Sleeping with one part warm, while the other is exposed to moisture or cold air; hence the more frequent occurrence among the laboring and indigent part of the community.

Pathology. The views entertained of the Pathology of Rheumatism, are, that it is, a peculiar inflammatory affection of the fibrous tissue - differing in some respects from a common case of phlegmasia, both in progress and termination. As a general rule it may be asserted that Rheumatism does not tend to suppuration. In a few rare instances the contrary has been stated to have taken place, but they are so rare as not at all to effect the general rule. It assumes a variety of forms, attacking for the most part

the larger joints. Sometimes it is seated in other parts, as the loins, head, and in some few cases on the superficies of the body. Rheumatism sometimes becomes retrocedent, falling on the alimentary canal and other internal viscera, when in a debilitated state.

Prognosis. A general, but not an unnatural prospect perspiration; the deposit of a lateritious sediment in the urine, eruptions on the skin, a moderate hæmorrhage of blood from the nose, or some other parts, ~~as, that~~ may be looked upon as favourable symptoms; On the other hand when the inflammation becomes erysipelatous and assumes a dark red colour, and this followed by metastasis to some of the internal viscera, showing the symptoms of idiopathic disease, are to be considered as unfavourable. Rheumatism seldom proving fatal affords few opportunities, for post mortem examinations,

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a thickening of the membranes, adhesions and gelatinous effusions, are the most usual appearances exhibited.

Of the cure. The principal object to be attended in the acute form of rheumatism, is to obviate the general inflammation, and the best to fulfill such an indication, is venesection, and where vascular excitement is considerable, constitution robust and attended with great heat and pain, the lancet should be used to a considerable extent, to untile some decided impression is produced on the system. In the United States venesection is empirically demanded, as well to prepare for the administration of other remedies, as to accomplish the above indication, for without such preparatory steps their therapeutic effects are not obtained. Although I consider venesection of the greatest importance, in most cases, yet cases do occur, in which it should

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not be repeated without great circumspection; such as are of irritable habits, and such as are unattended with much general inflammation; here, general bleeding from the system ought probably do great harm.

Purgatives. The benefit derived by making a detraction from the general circulation by purging, in the early stage of rheumatism, is no less remarkable, than in any other inflammatory affection. Rheumatism will, by negligence or bad management, sometimes continue for a considerable ~~space~~ of time, without much abatement. The phlogistic diathesis is here kept up, while the strength of the system is so much reduced, as utterly to forbid the farther loss of blood. Even of venesection be admissible from the degree of excitement remaining, it generally does harm: In this state purging will prove of great advantage

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In proportion as we pursue the practice of purging under similar circumstances, do we obtain, ~~to we obtain~~ its beneficial effects. - the mobility of the arteries becomes quieted and the excitement diffused over the system, which is, under such circumstances, dependant on the blood vessels. - The saline purges are best. Calomel administered so as to obtain its purgative operation, often proves of great service.

Vomits. - Emetics were generally resorted to by Dr Haygarth, as preliminary to the administration of the bark. The use of emetics in this disease does not appear to be of much importance, except in in such cases as are attended with intermittent, or where the stomach becomes loaded, which last is a very rare occurrence. If any advantage is to be derived from vomiting, except under the circumstances above mentioned, it must be by their pervading influence over the circulating system, and the relaxation they produce on the

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Sudorifics.— These form a very important part, in the treatment of rheumatism; as remedies in this disease they have been extolled for centuries, and were the only means resorted to in its removal, nevertheless they should not be employed until much direct depletion has been processed. It is stated, that when sweating takes place in a highly excited state of the system, it proves of no service, but on the contrary aggravates the symptoms. After having reduced arterial action, we may commence with diaphoretics of the milder kind:— such as the ammoniacal and nitrous preparations; we then commence with some of a more stimulating nature. The Dovers powder is a remedy of great efficacy in this disease, and has the undivided confidence of most practitioners, but to procure its beneficial effects, strict attention should be paid to

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to the state of the system, and never exhibit it while the least excitement whatever remains. Sweating once induced, should be continued for twenty four hours, if there should be no circumstances which would induce us to discontinue it. In conducting the sweating, particular attention to the state of the system, should not, by any means, be neglected, as the sweating may be carried forward without being of any service, but on the contrary be productive of injury by weakening the patient, and rendering him liable to become affected by the slightest exposure. Local affections. The pain in these cases are very excruciating, no doubt keeping up fever and general irritation. Practitioners differ as to the proper mode of treatment, by some cold has been recommended to be applied to the inflamed parts, and by others it has been equally disapproved of. This practice has been in this country on the authority of the Russian phy-

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sicians, but not with sufficient success to admit of repetition. Why the dose with not do as well here, as in most cases of inflammation, has not as yet been satisfactorily explained. The practice followed in our cases, as are attended with much pain and inflammation, and that confined to one particular part, is to resort to topical depletion by leeches - followed by a succession of blisters. — Now and then rheumatism attacks parts such as the heart, lungs and diaphragm which, from their great importance to the well-being of the animal economy, demand the most prompt and efficacious treatment. Blisters should be employed as near the original part affected as possible, this action being very slow, we resort to sinapisms and every measure to hasten their operation.

Diet. — It should be always of the lightest kind, consisting chiefly of simple diluents - such as

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whey, barley water, thin gruels and sometimes with the addition of some ripe fruits.
When the symptoms subside, the patients may have some animal food, but if there is the least fever it should not be given.
The convalescence. The use of tonic medicines sometimes become necessary, the bark alone, or combined with some mineral acid, is very beneficial. The stiffness, aching and debility which usually follow the inflammatory state, yield to exercise and frictions.
The prophylaxis - It consists in the strict avoidance of the causes, and every thing that would have a tendency, either generally or locally, to debilitate the system. Flannel worn next the skin should not be omitted, and persons of a delicate habit should wear it through the year unnecessarily long.